

American Government: Process and Policies

PSCI 1050D.091

Fall 2013

UNT Dallas

Dwight D. Burns, Instructor



University of North Texas at Dallas

Fall 2013

Syllabus

PSCI 1050D.091 – American Government: Process and Policies

Department of Social Sciences; Division of Liberal Arts and Life Sciences

Instructor Name: Dwight D. Burns

Class Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays; 5:30pm-6:50pm

Location: Building 2, Room 212

Email Address: dwight.burns@unt.edu

Office Location: Building 2, Room 305

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7:00pm-8:00pm

Course Description: This course explores political parties, elections, interest groups, mass media, public opinion and public policy. During the semester, we will gain a better understanding about how our political system affects us, and likewise, how we affect it.

Prerequisites: None. However, knowledge of material covered in PSCI 1040 lays a foundation in democratic principles and the organization of American government that will benefit discussions in this course.

Required Text: *The New American Democracy*, 7th Edition. Fiorina, Peterson, Johnson, and Mayer

Also, students are required to keep current on public affairs. Quizzes and exams will include questions drawn from major stories covered by print, broadcast and on-line news organizations. Additional online readings linked to homework assignments will be assigned.

Course Goals or Overview:	
Learning Objectives/Outcomes: At the end of this course, the student will:	
1	Be able to discuss individual and mass behaviors of the American electorate with regards to the decision to participate, voter turnout, voter choice, party electoral strategies and bureaucratic decision-making.
2	Be able to discuss the policy processes in the American federal and Texas state governments;
3	Demonstrate the ability to write cogently about major issues in American and state government and public responses to those initiatives;
4	Define roles and processes used to produce policy;
5	Identify past, current and future issues of American and Texas government, including differences and similarities in state and federal approaches to major policy initiatives;
General Education objectives	
6	The course is designed to enhance critical thinking through inquiry and analysis and the creative linking of disparate or similar concepts.
7	The course is designed to enhance written, oral and reading skills to promote communication.
8	The course is designed to ensure UNT Dallas graduates are socially responsible, interculturally competent, and civically engaged through enhanced knowledge of local and global governments and issues, and through various culture-based approaches underlying government institutions and policy.
9	The course promotes personal responsibility through discussions of ethical problems and reasoning in the public sphere.
10	Taken together, these general education objectives are designed to achieve the ultimate goal of the university, to provide skills and a conceptual foundation that allows graduates to continue learning long after leaving the university.

Course Evaluation Methods

This course will utilize the following instruments to determine student grades and proficiency of the learning outcomes for the course.

- **Exams** – Written tests include identification, multiple choice, short answer and essay questions, and are designed to measure knowledge of presented course material.
- **Class Participation** – weekly participation in class discussions.

Grading Matrix

Instrument	Percent of Grade
Exam 1	10%
Exam 2	10%
Exam 3	10%
Final exam	15%
Homework assignments (approx. 5)	25%
Chapter and public affairs quizzes; other assignments (approx. 5)	25%
Class participation	5%
Total:	100%

Grade Determination:

A = 90% or better

B = 80 – 89%

C = 70 – 79%

D = 60 – 69%

F = less than 60%

Course Outline

Date	Topics
<u>August</u>	
29 – Thursday	Introductions, course overview
<u>September</u>	
3 – Tuesday	Political Parties Fiorina Ch. 8
5 – Thursday	Electing the President Fiorina Ch. 10
10 – Tuesday	Electing the Congress Fiorina Ch. 11
12 – Thursday	State and Local Elections
17 – Tuesday	Voting Fiorina Ch. 6
19 – Thursday	Mass Media Fiorina Ch. 9
24 – Tuesday	Review
26 – Thursday	Unit Test 1
<u>October</u>	
1 – Tuesday	Interest Groups Fiorina Ch. 7
3 – Thursday	Public Opinion Fiorina Ch. 5
8 – Tuesday	Foreign & Defense Policy Fiorina Ch. 20
10 – Thursday	Economic & Fiscal Policy Fiorina Ch. 19
15 – Tuesday	Healthcare & Social-Safety Net Policy Fiorina Ch. 18
17 – Thursday	Environmental and Regulatory Policy Fiorina Ch. 18
22 – Tuesday	Immigration Policy

24 – Thursday	Review
29 – Tuesday	Unit Test 2
31 – Thursday	State & Local Government Policy: Overview
November	
5 – Tuesday	State & Local Government Policy: Taxes, Budgeting, and Public Finance
7 – Thursday	State & Local Government Policy: Education
12 – Tuesday	State & Local Government Policy: Criminal Justice, Social Policy, Regulations
14 – Thursday	State & Local Government Policy: Transportation, Water
19 – Tuesday	State & Local Government Policy: Economic Development, Urban Planning
21 – Thursday	Review
26 – Tuesday	Unit Test 3
28 – Thursday	Thanksgiving-No Class
December	
3 – Tuesday	Course Wrap-up, Conclusions
5 – Thursday	Review
10 – Tuesday	Final Exam: 5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

University Policies and Procedures

Students with Disabilities (ADA Compliance):

The University of North Texas Dallas faculty is committed to complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students' with documented disabilities are responsible for informing faculty of their needs for reasonable accommodations and providing written authorized documentation. Grades assigned before an accommodation is provided will not be changed as accommodations are not retroactive. For more information, you may visit the Student Life Office, Suite 200, Building 2 or call Laura Smith at 972-780-3632.

Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness Policy:

The Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available to you at the end of the semester, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider the SETE to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Assignment Policy:

*Assignments come in several flavors. 1. At least five readings will be assigned, with associated quiz questions that focus on reading mastery and critical thinking. These will be handed out at the start of classes and may be submitted at any time, up to the deadline noted in the syllabus. **Late assignments will be penalized 20 percent per day late.** 2. **I do not accept emailed assignments.** If you are unable to hand in the assignment, you may send in an email file to show you had completed the work, but if you do not present a hard copy by the next class, your grade for that assignment is zero. 3. Chapter quizzes, public affairs quizzes and in-class assignments will be given without notice. You are required to keep up with your reading. At least one quiz grade will be dropped, and **there are no quiz make-ups.** 4. Format and citation requirements will be included on written and posted assignments on Blackboard. An American Political Science Association citation sheet provides details of bibliography and citation form, and it is posted on the class pages on Blackboard under the Writing folder.*

Exam Policy:

Exams should be taken as scheduled. No makeup examinations will be allowed except for documented emergencies (See Student Handbook).

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is a hallmark of higher education. You are expected to abide by the University's code of Academic Integrity policy. Any person suspected of academic dishonesty (i.e., cheating or plagiarism) will be handled in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. Refer to the Student Code of Academic Integrity at <http://www.unt.edu/unt->

[dallas/policies/Chapter%2007%20Student%20Affairs.%20Education.%20and%20Funding/7.002%20Code%20of%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf](https://www.unt.edu/dallas/policies/Chapter%2007%20Student%20Affairs.%20Education.%20and%20Funding/7.002%20Code%20of%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf) for complete provisions of this code.

In addition, all academic work submitted for this class, including exams, papers, and written assignments should include the following statement:

On my honor, I have not given, nor received, nor witnessed any unauthorized assistance that violates the UNTD Academic Integrity Policy.

You will be required to sign the pledge to authenticate it.

Bad Weather Policy:

On those days that present severe weather and driving conditions, a decision may be made to close the campus. In case of inclement weather, call the UNT Dallas Campus main voicemail number (972) 780-3600 or search postings on the campus website www.unt.edu/dallas. Students are encouraged to update their Eagle Alert contact information, so they will receive this information automatically.

Attendance and Participation Policy:

The University attendance policy is substantially in effect for this course. However, you will be treated as responsible adults for most of the semester; you miss class at your own peril. Details of attendance policy will be discussed in class during the first session.

Class attendance and participation is crucial because the class is designed as a shared learning experience and essential information not in the textbook will be discussed in class. The dynamic and intensive nature of this course makes it impossible for students to make-up or to receive credit for missed classes. Attendance and participation are essential to your ability to demonstrate proficiency in the subject.

If you must miss a single, isolated class, you need not notify the instructor, but it becomes your responsibility to obtain notes of the missed class from your colleagues.

In the case of extended absences due to illness or crises, you are expected to inform the instructor as soon as possible about the extent of your absence, preferably before the absence occurs. You may be required to produce written evidence of the reasons for your absence.

In all cases, missing exams and other assignments requires a good-faith effort on your part to inform the instructor of your absence beforehand. Unless you have a rock-solid reason for missing the test, you will not be permitted to make it up.

Diversity/Tolerance Policy:

Students are encouraged to contribute their perspectives and insights to class discussions. However, offensive and inappropriate language and remarks offensive to others of particular nationalities, ethnic groups, sexual preferences, religious groups, genders, or other ascribed statuses will not be tolerated. Disruptions which violate the Code of Student Conduct will be referred to the Office of Student Life as the instructor deems appropriate.

Class-specific Policies:

- **Do not attempt to communicate with the professor through the Blackboard mail function.** I do not check it and will not respond. Please communicate through my official university e-mail listed at the top of this syllabus. I communicate with you by responding to whatever e-mail address you use to send your message. General notices are posted as announcements on Blackboard and/or as email to your official university address. Failure to check your email is no excuse for missing changes in test dates or assignments.
- **Students are expected to attend class**, since much of the material is not drawn from the text or readings. The university wants instructors to take attendance (see above), so you are required to sign an attendance sheet, at least for the first five weeks of the course. At that time, those students who have missed two classes will be contacted by Student Services about those absences. Attendance does not enhance your grade, but failure to attend will lead to lower grades as much of the course material is not in the books. Missing class will also mean missing pop quizzes based on the readings.
- Entering class late is sometimes unavoidable. **If you enter late, you are expected to do so as unobtrusively and quietly as possible.** Please take a seat on the fringes of the class and do not disrupt the lecture by taking a front row seat. Do not attempt to hand in homework while the lecture is going on. If you must leave class, do so quietly.
- **Cell phones must be turned off unless they are being used to record the class or presentations.** Texting, tweeting and other uses are not permitted. If I determine you are using your phone for purposes other than class, you will be required to keep the phone turned off for all future classes. See below.
- **Computers are a useful tool for taking notes in class, but these machines are often used for a number of other purposes such as emailing, web-surfing, game-playing etc. Note-taking on a computer is permitted in class, but secondary uses are not. See above. Students who are found to be using their computers for activities other than note-taking will be banned from using the computer in class for any purpose. If we should have a guest speaker, everyone will go computer-free for that session.**
- Students are expected to have **read the assigned material before class.**
- Students are encouraged to participate frequently in discussions in class. Participation will make the instructor's calls on borderline grades easier to make.
- **There are no 'right' answers to many of the issues we will discuss**, and you will not be graded on your opinions. However, please take into account that opinions supported by facts are more persuasive than opinions supported by more opinions. Make your arguments accordingly.
- Students are expected to be considerate of others. This means silencing cell phones, arriving on time, not leaving early and being respectful of others during discussion and debate. **Inflaming or intimidating fellow students will not be tolerated.** Opinions and arguments are fair game; the speaker is not. Listening courteously is a real world skill, and I have a commitment to civil discourse that I will enforce.