

University of North Texas at Dallas
Spring 2015
SYLLABUS

PSCI 1040D.090: American Government – Law and Institutions			
3 Hrs.			
Department of	Social Sciences	Division of	Liberal Arts and Life Sciences
Instructor Name:	Walt Borges		
Office Location:	Building 2: Rm 221		
Office Phone:	972.338.1552 (I only answer and check phone messages when I am in the office. Please communicate by official university email if you want a prompt reply.)		
Email Address:	walter.borges@unt.edu (do not use Blackboard for email communication)		
Office Hours:	Office hours will be set after I have met with all of my classes. I will try to maximize my availability to students. Office hours will be posted on the course Web page. There are no dedicated hours for each class – first come is first served. Making an appointment will guarantee you access at the times that fit your schedule.		
Virtual Office Hours:	None, but you may email at any time. I will try to answer within 24 hours.		
Classroom Location:	Building 2, Rm. 336		
Class Meeting Days & Times:	Mondays, Wednesdays 1 – 2:20 pm		
Course Catalog Description:			
Prerequisites:	None		
Co-requisites:			
Required Text:	<p>Kollman, Ken. <i>The American Political System</i>, 2d ed. New York: W.W. Norton.</p> <p>Champagne, Anthony, and Edward J. Harpham. 2013. <i>Governing Texas: an Introduction to Texas Politics</i>. New York: WW Norton.</p> <p>Students are required to keep current on public affairs. Quizzes may contain questions drawn from the major stories covered by print, broadcast and internet news organizations. Caveat: many internet news sites are converting to pay-to-view sites with limited access for non-paying consumers. Others continue to provide free access. I recommend a few major news sites, a list of which is attached at the end of this syllabus.</p>		
Recommended Text and References:	Additional online readings linked to homework assignments and quizzes will be assigned. The course outline references relevant chapters.		
Access to Learning Resources:	<p>UNT Dallas Library: phone: (972) 780-3625; web: http://www.unt.edu/unt-dallas/library.htm</p> <p>UNT Dallas Bookstore: phone: (972) 780-3652; e-mail: 1012mgr@fhq.follett.com</p>		

Course Goals or Overview:	
Learning Objectives/Outcomes: At the end of this course, the student will:	
1	Be able to discuss the different approaches taken by the framers of the United States and Texas constitutions and the motivations behind the structure of each charter;
2	Demonstrate the ability to write cogently about major issues in American and state government and public responses to those initiatives;
3	Define roles and processes used in governing institutions in Texas and the United States;
4	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	
5	The course is designed to enhance critical thinking through inquiry and analysis and the creative linking of disparate or similar concepts.
6	The course is designed to enhance written, oral and reading skills to promote communication.
7	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.
8	The course promotes personal responsibility through discussions of ethical problems and reasoning in the public sphere.
9	Taken together, these general education objectives are designed to achieve the ultimate goal of the university, to provide a foundation and skills for you to continue learning long after you have left 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	Value (points or percentages)	Total
Midterm exam 1	10 marks	15 %
Midterm exam 2	10 marks	20 %
Final exam	15 marks	35 %
Written assignments (10-12)	50 marks	85 %
Class participation	15 marks	100 %
Total:	100 marks	

Grade Determination:

- A = 90% or better
- B = 80 – 89%
- C = 70 – 79%
- D = 60 – 69%
- F = less than 60%

Course Outline

This schedule is subject to change by the instructor. Any changes to this schedule will be communicated by the instructor in class and by posting on Blackboard.

DATE	TOPICS	Readings (complete by Monday class)
M Jan 19	Martin Luther King Day – no classes	
Wed Jan 21	General course info / how to read articles and documents / references and bibliographies	
Week 2 Jan. 26-28	Are American voters stupid?: Information, elections and governance in the United States	Party On, Dudes! (Online) Della Carpini & Keeter (Blackboard)
Week 3 Feb. 2-4	The best form of government?	Borges – political ideology (B)
Week 4 Feb. 9-11	The difficulties of democracy: collective action dilemmas, principal-agent problems and corruption	Kollman ch1 Borges – On corruption (B)
Week 5 Feb. 16-18	Contexts and constitutions: the origins of the US and Texas constitutions	Kollman ch2 Champagne & Harpham ch3
Week 6 Feb. 23-25	Constitutions continued Midterm review - M Feb. 23 / Midterm 1 – W Feb 25	
Week 7 March 2-4	Faction, party and government	Federalist Papers Nos. 10, 51 – Kollman p655 Dickinson (O) - The GOP and the Rich
Week 8 March 9-11	Federalism	Kollman ch3 C&H ch2
Week 9 March 16-18	Spring Break	
Week 10 March 23-25	Comparing Congress and the Texas Legislature	Kollman ch 5 C&H ch7
Week 11 Mar 30–Apr 1	The presidency as a principal-agent problem: executive orders, executive agreements and signing statements	Kollman ch6 Savage (O) – Signing statements
Week 12 April 6-8	The most powerful official in Texas – Governors, lite guvs and the plural executive	C&H ch8
Week 13 April 13-15	The myths of the robe Midterm review- M April 13 / Midterm 2 – W April 15	Interpreting stats and charts (handout)
Week 14 April 20-22	Judicial review / crime and punishment	Kollman ch8 C&H ch9
Week 15 April 27-29	Race in America: Obama and Roberts on race	Obama 2008 speech on race (O) Toobin (O)
Week 16 May 4-6	Elections	Kollman ch13 C&H ch5 Hassan (B) Slate (B) Brennan Center (O) Phila. Inquirer (O) Phila. Daily News (O)
W May 13	Final exam 2 pm – 4 pm	

A separate schedule of assignments and due dates will be distributed in class.

This Class...

This class is a reinvention of the basic government sequence at UNT Dallas. PSCI 1040D is supposed to satisfy two criteria: 1) the Texas Legislature's instruction to provide basic comparison of the Texas and federal government so that graduates will be better citizens, and 2) the educational imperative to use core curriculum courses to increase communication skills and train students to use critical thinking to analyze and link generalized concepts from different academic disciplines.

This course will not focus on lectures and simple regurgitation of facts about government. Rather, it will seek to provide in-depth discussion of the concepts, culture and assertions underlying US and Texas government, comparing and contrasting the two systems of laws and institutions that emerged from different problems and goals facing the authors of the US Constitution in 1787 and the framers of the Texas Constitution of 1876. We will also examine concepts like corruption, race, open government, media politics and political information to determine their impact on the current American and state politics.

Students will be asked to do several things in this class that will benefit them in the long run. First, you must read the material before coming to class each Monday. This class and your grade depends on the level of discussion we can achieve on Monday, because Wednesday's class will be a discussion of how to apply those ideas and write up the 12 writing exercises that will provide the bulk of your grade. A good Monday discussion should provide you with plenty of ideas for your written assignments.

Why so much writing? Yes, I know that many of you are unskilled writers and hate to put words on paper. Unfortunately, the ability to write with clarity is a basic skill that most college graduates will need to find and keep jobs. If you cannot write two or three clear paragraphs on a job application, you will lose out to those who can. If you cannot clearly express ideas in a memo, you are unlikely to keep the job. (Texting will take you only so far, especially if you leave out all the punctuation.)

If you think yourself a poor writer, don't freak. This class is designed to give you practice in expressing your ideas in writing. Practice is perhaps the most important feature in improving writing skills – by the third writing assignment in most semesters, students have eliminated the most common mistakes and show distinct improvement. No matter what your starting skills are, the improvement is what we work to achieve. You will see a lot of red ink, but that's to call your attention to needed improvements and does not indicate dropped points. Only a small portion of your grade will reflect writing – most points will be earned for content and critical thinking. As far as writing goes, it's not my job to put you down. It's my job to do everything I can to make you a better writer and student. Be aware that we won't solve every writing problem in a single semester, but we will help you get on track so that you can improve over time and do better in all your classes. (I said "we" because the class will have the assistance of a member of the Writing Center to help you sharpen your writing. You should feel comfortable in visiting the center frequently to help you sharpen your writing.)

So here are a few simple tips to help you succeed in the class and build you skills:

1. Read all the assigned material before class. You don't need to absorb the material completely; you just need to be familiar with the topic and its scope. Lecture outlines and previous semester study guides (both on the course Blackboard page) will help you determine what is important.
2. Participate in the discussions. State your views and use evidence or theory (not just an endorsement of the views of a person you like) to back up those ideas. If you feel like you don't know the material well enough, ask questions. Participation shows intelligence, determination and engagement, and nothing shows your interest better than asking a question about something you don't understand. Let me assure you that I will not think the less of you if you want to throw out a few "wild" ideas. Your undergraduate years are exactly when you should be trying on ideas like a suit of clothes and discarding them if they don't fit. (OK, one exception – we will not discuss UFOs and the abduction of Elvis. It simply has nothing to do with politics.)
3. Turn in all written assignments. On time. Grades deflate rapidly when assignments are not turned in at all, and this is the basis of most Fs I've given. Grades also take a hit when students are consistently penalized for being late. If you have problems with getting a particular assignment in on time, talk to me in advance of the due date. If you have a problem with getting all the assignments in on time – well, you will need a stronger argument or excuse to keep me from docking points.
4. Remember – practice will help you improve your writing. Don't freak over red ink. If you get the content and critical thinking right, you will do well.

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, so **there are no quiz make-ups.** 4. Format and citation requirements will be included on written assignments and posted 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_Integrity.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 UNT Dallas Campuses 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 expected because the class is designed as a shared learning experience and because 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 is 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. I do not post the notes of my lectures. Before you ask the professor what was missed, you should have reviewed notes for the missed class.

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 I will not respond. 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. Most students discover this about the time of the first midterm. The university wants instructors to take attendance (see above), so you are required to sign an attendance sheet with your initials. After the first five weeks of the course, students who have missed two classes or more 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 current affairs 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.** Let me emphasize that most of the text will not be new to you. The readings have two purposes. First, the text serves to refresh your memory of those distant government classes you once took in middle and high school. Second, the text will introduce you to the themes of collective action dilemmas and principal-agent problems that are endemic to representative democracies. Other readings and assignments will address specific political behavior characteristics, policy problems, and procedural anomalies that are not addressed in the text, so make sure you complete those on time.
- 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. **Flaming 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.

- Because this course is about discussion and writing, there will be few lectures as such, although I will use some PowerPoint slides to display information or prompt discussion. You will not have access to these slides outside class, but I will provide outlines of the course presentations in lecture courses with similar material. These outlines can be found on the course webpage on Blackboard.

APPENDIX – Following the news

As noted above, I am requiring students in this class to become conversant on the national and state level policy issues of the day. This requires students to listen to, to view and to read articles, video and sound bites from news organizations that cover public affairs. (E and TMZ are not news in that sense; neither is The Daily Show or Colbert Report.)

Following the news is a skill that is acquired through practice. To meet the requirements of this course:

1) students should follow the news daily through radio, TV, newspapers and internet news sources. At least one source should be checked daily, but it would be wise to read or listen to a number of sources that cover the news from different perspectives. That means you may want to check out Fox News or MSNBC occasionally, even though most of us would consider these to have evident biases in their presentation of the news.

2) students should understand the difference between reporting and punditry. Reporting is essentially the gathering and presentation of new information in cultural and political contexts. Punditry is analysis and interpretation based on preferences and political perspectives in order to achieve ideological or entertainment purposes. Many people choose their news sources because the source reinforces the person's preferences and prejudices. Students in this course will do better to look at sources that get the facts right rather than share the student's political perspective. Students should not substitute punditry for reporting as a source of information.

3) students should understand the difference between lucrative entertainment and costly coverage. Many talk show hosts and pundits would rather be controversial than thoughtful or perceptive. Drama and controversy attract a larger audience, and thus bring in more advertising dollars for the media business. Students may wonder why 'analysts' on shows and the internet often seem to find no agreement on the way forward. This is because they are chosen to contradict and yell at each other without listening in order to increase ratings and readership. Similarly, Lindsey Lohan's latest escapade or interview is of no value to this class.. Focus on the biggest political and policy stories.

With these ideas in mind, here are some premier news organizations you may want to follow. All have websites. Those with limited free access are starred (*).

RADIO

National Public Radio (NPR)

TV and VIDEO

CBS (national and local)

NBC (national and local)

ABC (national and local)

Fox (national and local)

PBS (national only)

CNN (national only)

MSNBC (national only)

CSPAN 1 and 2 (Congress)

N.B. National TV networks maintain websites but do not cover complex stories or those with weak video potential. For the purposes of this class, the major stories we are interested in should be reported on these sites.

NEWSPAPERS/INTERNET

New York Times* (5 articles a month/ front page headline view is free)

Washington Post* (20 articles a month/ front page headline view is free)

The Guardian – USA edition (this UK newspaper website often puts its American competitors to shame)

The Texas Tribune (online state news – this is the best single source for Texas news, with links to local coverage)

The Associated Press (the free Android cell phone app now provides many in-depth articles, a real change from the headline news offered in the past)

Reuters (economic news)

Remove this page, write your questions, sign and return by third day of class (June 4).

I have read and reviewed the syllabus and I understand that I am responsible for understanding the policies of the course.

_____ Student signature

_____ Student ID number

_____ Date signed

I have the following questions about the course syllabus and policies: