

University of North Texas at Dallas
Fall 2016
SYLLABUS

PSCI 1050.001: American Government – Law and Institutions	
3 Hrs.	
Department of Social Sciences	Division of Liberal Arts and Life Sciences
Instructor Name:	Walt Borges
Office Location:	Founders 2,221
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@untDallas.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. On weekends, expect longer delays.
Classroom Location:	Founders 2.307
Class Days & Times:	T Th 10 – 11:20 am
Course Catalog Description:	Political parties, elections, interest groups, mass media, public opinion and public policy.
Prerequisites:	None
Co-requisites:	None
Required Texts:	<p>Kollman, Ken. <i>The American Political System</i>, 2d ed. New York: W.W. Norton.</p> <p>The Texas Politics Project. 2015. <i>Texas Politics</i>, 2d ed. University of Texas at Austin. (Free access): http://www.webtexts.com/courses/9833-professor/traditional_book?token=3Kzk6bR2LQjwir8D9YzreC1p1EryH1Ke3_9bBYTBm88kjkUJMfALWoc29ktixcXTn0wvve2CqNoh0sGUu9EL_2g</p> <p>Students are required to keep current on public affairs, and quizzes will contain questions drawn from the major stories covered by print, broadcast and internet news organizations. I recommend a few major news sites, a list of which is attached at the end of this syllabus.</p>
Recommended Texts and References:	None, but additional online readings linked to homework assignments and quizzes may be assigned.

Access to Learning Resources:	UNT Dallas Library: phone: (972) 780-3625; web: http://www.unt.edu/unt-dallas/library.htm UNT Dallas Bookstore: phone: (972) 780-3652; e-mail: 1012mgr@fhcg.follett.com
Course Goals or Overview:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. American politics is in flux, moving from traditional party politics to media politics. At the same time, an emerging tidal wave of third party campaign spending by corporations, unions, alleged charitable and educational foundations, and wealthy individuals are distorting American electoral campaigns and legislative agendas into contests that clearly do not center on the common interests of a majority of Americans. To make matters worse, the American presidential election of 2016 offers what some observers are calling a historically poor choice. Other observers note that the political world, both in the United States and abroad, seems to be entering an era of “post-truth” politics. This course seeks to give students tools and associated knowledge to allow them to function effectively as citizens in the new political environment. 2. American political outcomes are shaped not just by constitutions, systems of laws, and government institutions, but also by universal human behaviors. In democracies, the preferences of a majority are supposed to determine the agenda and course of policy. But do they? To what extent are these preferences manifested accurately, and to what extent are they influenced by public and private institutions? This course explores the opinions, agenda setting and electoral behaviors of American citizens, three major models of American democracy (elitism, pluralism and hyperpluralism), and the private interests and institutions that seek to structure both the American political agenda and the direct use of power to achieve policy goals. 3. The final section of the course introduces students to the formal policy processes that involve interest groups, political parties, elected officials and unelected bureaucrats in the effort to promote national and state policy.
Learning Objectives/Outcomes: At the end of this course, the student will –	
1	Effectively communicate about US and Texas politics using appropriate terminology for political science, political philosophy and policy studies. (Communication skills.)
2	Demonstrate critical thinking by comparing, contrasting and critiquing foundational concepts of democratic elections, including the nature of campaign communications and the influence of large campaign contributions and third-party spending on election outcomes. (Critical Thinking and Communications Skills)
3	Analyze, compare and evaluate competing theories and research relating to voter turnout and voter choice, the behavior of candidates and parties in electoral campaigns and the roles of interest groups and government bureaucracies in constructing and implementing policy. (Critical Thinking)
4	Coherently analyze and discuss concepts of federal budgets and economic policy in the general context of competing theories on how and when to stimulate the American economy and to achieve balanced budgets. (Critical Thinking)
5	Analyze and write about the importance ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, religion and class in American political society and how demographic differences have shaped the diversity of representative government in the United States and Texas. (Social Responsibility, Cultural Diversity, and Communications Skills)

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** – Regular attendance , speaking in class discussions or asking relevant questions count towards class discussion. For each two classes you miss, you lose one participation point. Be on time and sign in to get full credit for participation. Late arrivals or frequent early departures will cost you participation points.

Grading Matrix:

Assessment	Measures SLO	Weight (%)	Aggregate
Midterm exam 1	2,3,4,5	15 percent	15%
Midterm exam 2	2,3,4,5	15 percent	30%
Final exam	2,3,4,5	20 percent	50%
Homework assignments	1,2,3,4,5	30 percent	80%
Public affairs quizzes	1,2,3,4,5	15 percent	95%
Class participation	1,2,3,4,5	5 percent	100%
Total:			

Grade Determination:

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

Course Outline (next page)

Reading assignments should be completed by the date listed, but if the course schedule falls off pace, as I think it will, you should adjust your reading. While there is no penalty for not doing so: the failure to read the book will catch up with you at the end of the course.

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	SLOs	Readings	Assignments Due
T Aug 23	General course info / how to read articles and documents / references and citation / R, D v. r,d	1		
Th Aug 25	The nature of politics: concepts / collective dilemmas and principal-agent problems	1,2,3,4,5		
T Aug 30	Democracy and participation	1,2,3,4,5		Political information HRA due
Th Sept 1	Democracy and corruption	1,2,3,4,5	Borges: corruption (BlackBoard)	
T Sept 6	Public opinion	1,2,3,4,5	Kollman (K) ch.9	
Th Sept 8	Voting behavior : Turnout	1,2,3,4,5	K ch.10, Texas Politics (TxPol) 8.1 – 8.15	Voter ID HRA due
T Sept 13	Voting behavior : Choice	1,2,3,4,5		
Th Sept 15	Elections as institutions	1,2,3,4,5	K ch.13	
T Sept 20	Campaigns	1,2,3,4,5		
Th Sept 22	Campaign ads	1,2,3,4,5		
T Sept 27	Campaign ads continued	1,2,3,4,5		
Th Sept 29	Catch-up and review			
T Oct 4	MIDTERM #1 (in class)	2,3,4,5		
Th Oct 6	Political parties	1,2,3,4,5	K ch 12, TxPol 9.1-9.17	GOP and the Rich HRA due
T Oct 11	Party behavior – Downs revisited	1,2,3,4,5		
Th Oct 13	The press, policy and the public agenda	1,2,3,4,5	K ch 14	
T Oct 18	Agenda setting: presidents, news media, interest groups and movements	1,2,3,4,5		
Th Oct 20	Interest groups: roles	1,2,3,4,5	K ch 11, TxPol 10.1 – 10.10	
T Oct 25	Policy process and priorities	1,2,3,4,5		Influencing policy HRA due
Th Oct 27	The government and the economy	1,2,3,4,5	K ch 15	
T Nov 1	Catch-up and review			Budget priorities list due
Th Nov 3	MIDTERM #2 (in class)	2,3,4,5		
T Nov 8	Fiscal policy and budgets	1,2,3,4,5	TxPol 11.1-11.5, 11.10 - 11.13	
Th Nov 10	Taxes and policy	1,2,3,4,5		Debt reduction simulator HRA due
T Nov 15	Economic crises	1,2,3,4,5	K ch 16	
Th Nov 17	Social safety nets and welfare	1,2,3,4,5		
T Nov 22	Health care policy	1,2,3,4,5	TxPol 11.6 – 11.9	
Th Nov 24	Thanksgiving (no classes)			
T Nov 29	Immigration policy	1,2,3,4,5		
Th Dec 1	Catch-up and review	1,2,3,4,5		
TBA	Final Exam			

Additional readings and assignments may be added

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%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 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 nature of this course

makes it difficult 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.
- **For each two absences, you will lose one point off your participation grade, which is five percent of your final grade.** If you show up to class late, do not expect to have the opportunity to sign the attendance sheet. Your attendance is required at the start of class, so plan accordingly.
- **If you enter late, you are expected to do so as unobtrusively and quietly as possible** Entering class late is sometimes unavoidable.. 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.
- **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** 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.. If we should have a guest speaker, everyone will go computer-free for that session.
- **Read the assigned material before class..** 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.
- **Participate frequently in discussions in class or ask relevant questions..** Participation will make the instructor's calls on borderline grades easier to make. If you don't want to share your opinion, that's okay, but be prepared to ask a few questions. Don't worry about appearing uninformed or unaware: I was a reporter for 25 years and I know it is better to ask the obvious or dumb question than to assume you know the answer. The failure to ask the obvious question is often why journalists get things wrong.

- **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.
- **Flaming or intimidating fellow students will not be tolerated.** 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. 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.
- **Do not regard lecture outlines as substitutes for being in class.** I will post outlines of the lecture presentations (without images and charts) on the class Blackboard page. But you will find that much of what I explain and emphasize is not laid out in detail in the outline.

You will not have access to the actual presentations outside of class. There are several reasons for this:

- 1) One-time use of images and charts for teaching is fair use under current legal rulings, but were I to allow you permanent access to those images, I would have to secure formal permissions for every image.
- 2) Some students substitute post-lecture PowerPoint downloads for attending class or note-taking. Others substitute verbatim regurgitation of PwrPt material on tests and quizzes instead of conducting thoughtful analysis. Studies show that note-taking does enhance student performance, so please develop that skill.
- 3) There is potential for an ownership dispute over course content posted online. The presentations constitute my work product, virtually all of which was assembled before I began teaching at UNTD. Many universities are now enamored with online courses, and many attempt to claim legal ownership of all work prepared by individuals employed at the school or posted on university websites, whether or not the content was compiled on university time or published during university employment. My lecture material and formats were compiled by me outside the UNTD environment after years of study, reading and research. The knowledge and formats in the PowerPoints existed before I began teaching these courses. Previous presentations were adjusted to fit UNT course requirements.

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: