

Federal Government (GOVT-1305) – Fall 2025

Instructor Information:

Instructor: Dr. Curtis McDowell

Building: Founders Hall

Classroom: 338

Class Time: 11:30AM - 12:50PM

Course Dates: Mondays and Wednesday

Course Description:

This course offers a comprehensive examination of the structure, function, and evolving dynamics of the American federal government, grounded in the analytical framework of *The Logic of American Politics* by Kernell et al. Students will explore how institutional design and collective action shape political outcomes, and how these outcomes are increasingly influenced by private interests, partisan polarization, and the rise of post-truth politics.

Through critical analysis of democratic models—elitism, pluralism, and hyper-pluralism—students will assess the extent to which public preferences are accurately represented in policy decisions. The course also investigates the growing influence of third-party campaign spending by corporations, unions, foundations, and wealthy individuals, and its impact on electoral integrity and legislative agendas.

In the final section, students will engage in the formal policy-making process, examining the roles of interest groups, political parties, elected officials, and bureaucrats. By the end of the course, students will be equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary to understand and navigate the complexities of contemporary American governance.

Course Overview and Goals:

1. Apply Institutional Design Concepts to Understand Government Function
 - a) Use Kernell's "toolkit" of institutional design—command, veto, agenda control, voting rules, and delegation—to analyze how American political institutions operate and evolve as responses to collective action problems.
2. Critically Evaluate the Role of Private Influence in Public Decision-Making
 - a) Investigate how corporate, union, foundation, and individual spending distorts electoral campaigns and legislative agendas, challenging the democratic ideal of majority rule and raising questions about elitism and hyper-pluralism.
3. Explore the Impact of Political Polarization and Post-Truth Politics
 - a) Examine the rise of emotional engagement, misinformation, and declining trust in institutions, and how these trends affect voter behavior, media consumption, and democratic accountability.
4. Analyze Competing Models of Democracy and Citizen Participation

- a) Compare elitism, pluralism, and hyper-pluralism as frameworks for understanding power distribution, and assess how public opinion and electoral behavior reflect or diverge from these models.
- 5. Understand the Policy-Making Process in a Fragmented Political Landscape
 - a) Study how interest groups, political parties, elected officials, and bureaucrats interact within formal policy processes, and how these interactions are shaped by institutional constraints and strategic behavior.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

SLO #	Student Learning Outcome
1	Explain the origin and development of constitutional democracy in the United States.
2	Demonstrate knowledge of the federal system.
3	Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice.
4	Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government.
5	Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in the political system.
6	Analyze the election process.
7	Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
8	Analyze issues and policies in U.S. politics.
9	Communicate effectively in written, oral, and visual forms.
10	Apply critical thinking to political issues.
11	Demonstrate social and personal responsibility.

Why Attendance Matters – Attendance Policy

In-person classroom discussions and learning are essential for developing a deeper understanding of political systems and current events. They foster critical thinking, respectful debate, and collaborative learning. Consistent attendance ensures students stay engaged and benefit from peer and instructor insights. Attendance will be taken at every class. Please be proactive and email Dr. McDowell if you anticipate being absent. The University attendance policy is in effect for this course. Please refer to Policy 7.005 Student Attendance at <https://www.untDallas.edu/hr/upol>.

Required Textbook:

Kernell, S. (2006). *The logic of American politics*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

Course Schedule:

Week	Assignment	Due Date	SLOs
Week 1	Introduction to the Course & Logic of American Politics (Ch. 1) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Aug 29, 2025	Understand institutional logic and collective action problems
Week 2	Constitutional Foundations (Ch. 2) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Sept 5, 2025	Analyze the Constitution and foundational principles
Week 3	Federalism (Ch. 3) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Sep 12, 2025	Evaluate federalism and intergovernmental relations
Week 4	Civil Rights (Ch. 4) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Sep 19, 2025	Examine civil rights movements and legal protections
Week 5	Civil Liberties (Ch. 5) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Sep 26, 2025	Understand civil liberties and constitutional interpretation
Week 6	The Media (Ch. 14) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Oct 3, 2025	Assess the role of media in politics
Week 7	Midterm	Oct 10, 2025	Test – chapters 1 – 5 & 14
Week 8	The Bureaucracy (Ch. 8) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Oct 17, 2025	Evaluate bureaucratic organization and accountability
Week 9	Political Parties (Ch. 12)/ Interest Groups (Ch. 13) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Oct 24, 2025	Understand party systems and their influence
Week 10	The Judiciary (Ch. 9) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Oct 31 2025	Understand judicial review and court structure

Week 11	The Presidency (Ch. 7) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Nov 7, 2025	Understand the role of the unitary actor and its assigned duties.
Week 11	Midterm	Nov 14, 2025	Test chapters 7, 8, 9, 12, & 13
Week 12	Congress (Ch. 6) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Nov 14, 2025	Understand legislative structure and behavior
Week 13	Voting, campaign and Elections (Ch. 11) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Nov 21, 2025	Analyze voter behavior and participation trends
Week 14	Thanksgiving Break – No Class	Nov 28, 2025	No Class this week
Week 15	Is there a Logic to American Policy (Ch. 15) - Video Quiz - Chapter Quiz - Discussion	Dec 5, 2025	
Week 16	---Final Exam	Online	Final exam – chapters, 6, 11 & 15

Assignment Deadlines and Communication Policy:

All **discussions, video quizzes, chapter quizzes, and assignments** are due **every Friday by 11:59 PM**. **Weekly discussions** must be submitted by **Saturday at 11:59 PM**. Late work will not be accepted unless the student has notified the instructor **at least 24 hours prior to the due date**. All course-related communication must be conducted through **Microsoft Outlook email**. Messages sent via Canvas will not be monitored or responded to.

Grade Determination: (example of percentage grading)

A =; i.e. 90% or better

B = i.e. 80 – 89 %

C = i.e. 70 – 79 %

D = i.e. 60 – 69 %

F = i.e. less than 60%

Grading Breakdown:

Chapter Quizzes – 25%

Midterm Exam (2) – 20%
Final Exam – 25%
Discussions (14) – 15%
Video Quizzes (12) – 15%

Campus Policies:

All students must follow University of North Texas at Dallas' policies on academic integrity, accessibility, and classroom conduct. For full details, visit www.UNTDallas.edu.

Assignment Policy:

The University attendance policy is substantially in effect for this course. Please refer to Policy 7.005 Student Attendance at <http://www.untDallas.edu/hr/upol> I will monitor attendance for the first five weeks in order to identify those who may be in peril of failing the class. However, you will be treated as responsible adults for most of the semester: You miss class at your own peril, and frequent class absences will cost you participation points. 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 missing, you should have reviewed notation 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 (swearing) and remarks offensive to others of 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 Dean of Students, as the instructor deems appropriate. (UNTD Policy 7.001)

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

Exam Policy:

Exams should be taken as scheduled. No makeup examinations will be allowed except for documented emergencies or prior notification of your absence (See Policy 7.005 Student Attendance at <https://www.untDallas.edu/hr/upol>).

University Policies and Procedures:

Students with Disabilities (ADA Compliance):

The University of North Texas at Dallas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Disabilities Services Office (DSO) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the DSO will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodation at any time; however, DSO notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delays in implementation. Note that a student must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet/communicate with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Disability Services Office website at <http://www.untDallas.edu/disability>. You may also contact them by phone at 972-338-1777; by email at UNTDDisability@untDallas.edu on the first floor of the Student Center.

Canvas Instructure Accessibility Statement: *optional if you do not use Canvas for the course*

University of North Texas at Dallas is committed to ensuring that online and hybrid courses are usable by all students and faculty including those with disabilities. If you encounter any difficulties with technologies, please contact our ITSS Department. To better assist them, you would want to have the operating system, web browser and information on any assistive technology being used. The Canvas Instructure Accessibility Statement is provided at <https://www.canvaslms.com/accessibility>.

NOTE: Additional instructional technology tools, such as Turnitin, Respondus, Panopto, and publisher cartridge content (i.e. MyLab, Pearson, etc.) may NOT be fully ADA compliant. Please contact our Disability Office should you require additional assistance utilizing any of these tools.

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 UNT Dallas Academic Integrity Policy in the appropriate Catalog at <http://dallascatalog.unt.edu>.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabrication of information or citations, facilitating acts of dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students.

Web-based Plagiarism Detection: Please be aware in some courses, students may be required to submit written assignments to Turnitin, a web-based plagiarism detection service, or another method. If submitting to Turnitin, please remove your title page and other personal information.

Discussion Community Tolerance Policy:

Students are encouraged to contribute their perspectives and insights to class discussions. However, offensive & inappropriate language (swearing) 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's Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct will be referred to the Dean of Students as the instructor deems appropriate (UNT Policy 7.001 found at <https://www.untDallas.edu/hr/upol>). ***The Code of Student's Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct (UNT Policy 7.001 found at <https://www.untDallas.edu/hr/upol>)*** describes disruption as the obstructing or interfering with university functions or activity, including any behavior that interferes with students, faculty, or staff access to an appropriate educational environment. Examples of disruptive behavior that may result in a student being directed to leave the classroom include but are not limited to: failure to comply with reasonable directive of University officials, action or combination of actions that unreasonably interfere with, hinder, obstruct, or prevents the right of others to freely participate,

threatening, assaulting, or causing harm to oneself or to another, uttering any words or performing any acts that cause physical injury, or threaten any

individual, or interfere with any individual's rightful actions, and harassment. You are encouraged to read the Code of Student's Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct for more information related to behaviors that could be considered disruptive.

Course Evaluations:

Students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness are a requirement for all organized classes at UNT Dallas. This short survey will be made available to you at the end of the semester via your campus email, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I will not have access to the results of the evaluations until after final grades have been posted. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider students' evaluations to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Bad Weather Policy:

Campus facilities will close and operations will be suspended when adverse weather and/or safety hazards exist on the UNTD campus or if travel to the campus is deemed dangerous as the result of ice, sleet or snow. In the event of a campus closure, the Marketing and Communication Department will report closure information to all appropriate major media by 7 a.m. That department will also update the UNTD website, Facebook and Twitter with closing information as soon as it is possible. For more information please refer to <http://www.untDallas.edu/police/resources/notifications>.

Inclement Weather and Online Classes:

Online classes may or may not be affected by campus closures due to inclement weather. Unless otherwise notified by your instructor via e-mail, online messaging, or online announcement, students should assume that assignments are due as scheduled.

Technology Assistance: In order to successfully access the materials in Canvas, UNT Dallas advises that your computer be equipped with the minimum system requirements listed on the first page of the syllabus.

If you experience difficulty accessing or using components of the course, try using Google Chrome browser. If you still experience technical difficulties, first, notify your instructor.

If the problem is still not resolved, call Distance Learning at the phone number listed on the first page of the syllabus. Also, no matter what browser you use, always enable pop-ups.

For more information see:

- UNT Dallas Canvas Technical Requirements:
<https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10721>

Canvas Instructure Support & Unsupported Operating Systems:
<https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10720>

Remove this page, write your questions, sign and email to me by third day of class.

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

_____ Student signature

_____ Student name (printed)

_____ Date signed

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