

SYLLABUS

University of North Texas at Dallas

Spring 2025

PSCI 1040.001: American Government – Law and Institutions 3 Hrs.	
Department of Social Sciences	Division of Liberal Arts and Life Sciences
Instructor Name:	Dr. McDowell
Office Location:	DAL 2 - Room 230
Office Phone:	972.338.1564 (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:	curtis.mcdowell@untDallas.edu
Office Hours:	Virtual and in person (by appointment only)
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 308
Class Days & Times:	T/Th 10:00 am – 11:20 am
Course Catalog Description:	U.S. and Texas constitutions, federalism, local government, institutions, civil rights and civil liberties. Satisfies legislative requirement of a course emphasizing U.S. and Texas constitutions. PSCI 1040 must be taken to satisfy the requirement of a course emphasizing U.S. and Texas constitutions.
Prerequisites:	None
Co-requisites:	None
Required Texts:	<p>McClain. D, Paula & Steven C. Tauber American Government in Black and White: Diversity and Democracy, 4th Edition. Oxford Press (1/23/2019) ISBN-13 978-0190928513</p> <p>Champagne, Anthony, Edward J. Harpham and Jason Casellas. 2017. <i>Governing Texas: an Introduction to Texas Politics</i>, 3rd ed. New York: WW Norton. ISBN 978-0-393-28367-9 paper / ebook</p> <p>[not required] 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:	<p>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. The American presidential election of 2016 offered what some observers called a historically poor choice, with one billionaire candidate successfully claiming, "I'm with you" to the American public and another candidate whose official slogan was "I'm with her." The election of Donald Trump as president is the subject of much speculation but remains largely unexplained. The appointment of businesspersons, billionaires and generals to the Trump cabinet raises questions about Trump's pledges to be responsive to the interests of the American mainstream. American foreign policy is in disarray as Trump praises Russia and provokes China and US allies. Many observers note that the political world, both in the United States and abroad, seems to be entering an era of "post-truth" politics.</p> <p>This course seeks to give students tools and associated knowledge to allow them to function effectively in the new political environment.</p> <p>2. A key measure of any political society is its constitution, the set of laws, beliefs and institutions that structures a polity. Americans live in a federal system where both the federal and state constitutions structure their lives, and there is often conflict between the principles, approaches and motivations of the state and national governments. Constitutions are a response to the times in which they were written, and nowhere in the United States is this clearer than in the differences in the U.S. and Texas constitutions.</p> <p>This course will explore how and why the U.S. and Texas constitutions were created with the purpose of understanding the multiple approaches to constructing workable governments.</p>

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 democracy and mixed government, such as confederation, unitary government and federalism, and the parliamentary and presidential forms of democratic government. Demonstrate critical thinking by comparing and contrasting the Texas and US constitutions in both in terms of historical context and the impacts the two constitutions had on state and federal approaches to institutional design and policy; (Critical Thinking and Communications Skills)
3	Analyze, compare and evaluate competing theories and research relating to elections and institutions such as legislatures, judiciaries and the selection of officeholders in all three branches. (Critical Thinking)
4	Coherently analyze and discuss concepts of federalism and the tensions and solutions it creates for government problem solving. (Critical Thinking)
5	Analyze and write about the importance ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, religion and class in American political society and how demographic differences, constitutional and civil rights have both shaped the American political system and been shaped by it. (Social Responsibility, Cultural Diversity, and Communications Skills)

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 Canvas.

Week • Group - Day (T/TH)	TOPICS	SLOs	Readings	Assignments Due
Week 1	Zoom meeting to go over the calls. Chapter 1 American Government and Politics in a Racially Divided World.	1	Chapter 1 pgs. 4 – 22	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 1
Week 2	Chapter 2 – The Constitution: Rights and Race Intertwined	1,2,3,4,5	Evaluating Equity (Discussion Question)	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 2
Week 3	Chapter 3 - Federalism: Balancing Power, Balancing Rights	1,2,3,4	Measuring Equality (Black and Latino Representation in State Legislature)	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 3
Week 4	Chapter 4 – Civil Liberties: Freedom and Government Authority in Tension	1 – 5	Measuring Equality (Privacy)	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 4
Week 5	Chapter 5 - Civil Rights: Inequality and Equality	2 - 5	Measuring Equality (Voter Registration and the Voting Rights Act of 1965)	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 5
Week 6	Chapter 6 - Congress: Representation and Lawmaking	1 – 5	Measuring Equality (The Influence of Race and Political Party on Congressional Voting)	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 6
Week 7	Review week (Tuesday)			Review in Groups
Week 8	Midterm 1 (Thursday)		Chapters 1 - 6	25 multiple choice questions 2 Short Essay Questions
Week 9	Open forum (Work TBA)			
Week 10	Chapter 7 - The Presidency: Conventional Wisdom Redefined)	3 – 5	Measuring Equality (Scatterplots of the Obama and Trump vote and Minority population)	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 7
Week 11	Chapter 9 - The Judiciary: Blanding Law and Politics	1 – 5	Measuring Equality (President's Records of Minority Judicial Appointment to the Lower Federal Courts)	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 8
Week 12	Chapter 11 - The Media: Reinforcing Racial Stereotypes?	2,3,5	A History Media and Politics (330) The Media Industry (341) Press Coverage of Politics and Government officials and Institutions (346))	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 9
Week 13	Midterm 2	1,,2,3,4,5	Chapter 7, 9 & 11	27 multiple choice questions
Week 14	Chapter 15 -Voting and Elections: The end of the Obama Era	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	General Elections (479) Campaign for Elections (482) Why Americans Do not Vote (497)	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 10
Week 15	Chapter 10: Public Opinion: Divided by Race?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Expression of Public Opinion (300) Measuring Public Opinion (301) The Mechanics of Poling (302)	Chapter Quiz Chapter Video (assignment) Discussion 11
Week 16	Final Exam			Chapter 15, 11 & 10

Virtual				
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Additional readings and assignments may be added

Course Evaluation Methods

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

- Exams – *This class will have 3 exams composed of multiple choice and short essay questions. The essay response will require using ASPA (or APA) format with a premise, evidence and conclusion statements. If you are unfamiliar with this style of writing, please contact the writing lab for more information.*
- Assignments – *Assignments are either multiple choice or short essay format. You can use information from the video, literature or lecture (ppt) notes but always use citations when doing so. I will grade your answers using a rubric that reviews format, grammar and depth of response so be thorough and succinct in your response.*

Grading Proportions:

Instrument	Value (points or percentages)	Cumulative % of grade Total
Assignments	10 assignments – 30%	30 percent
Chapter Quiz	10 Chapter Quizzes – 15%	45 percent
Discussion Board	10 Discussions – 15%	60 percent
Midterm Exam (s)	2 Midterms – 10% ea.	80 percent
Final Exam	1 Final Exam – 20%	100 percent
Total		100 percent

Grade Determination: (example of percent to 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%

Course-Specific Policies

Attendance and Participation Policy:

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>.

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 missed, 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 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 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 (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 accommodations for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodations 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 accommodations 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 letter 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.

Diversity/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:

Student's evaluations of teaching effectiveness is 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 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: