

Honors U.S. and Texas Government

PSCI 2316

Fall 2017 - Rawlins Edition



Course Overview

This course will introduce students to the roles of the United States and Texas governments in the American political system. We will consider the institutions, processes, and decisions of political actors that define American and Texas government. We focus particular attention on the United States and Texas constitutions, civil rights and liberties, federalism, and the institutions that comprise the three branches of government.

CANVAS

UNT is beginning the process of changing its Learning Management System from Blackboard to Canvas. Our class will use Canvas. Find our course page at <http://unt.instructure.com>

SLACK

We'll be using Slack for course-related discussions. Slack can be used for full-class, small group, and one-on-one conversations. Please use Slack (rather than email) for course-related communications. There is a link to join the class Slack channel in Canvas or you can navigate to <https://psci2316.slack.com> Join using your UNT email. Your username should take the form: yourfirstname.yourlastname.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Professor Bethany Blackstone

CLASS MEETINGS

Mondays and Wednesdays,
3:30 pm-4:50 pm

Rawlins Multi-Purpose Room

OFFICE HOURS

Mondays, Wednesdays,
and Fridays from 9:30
am-10:30 am in the
Business Leadership
Building (BLB) Lobby,
Wednesdays from
6:00-8:00 pm in the
Rawlins Lobby, and by
appointment

REQUIRED MATERIALS

American Anomaly (3rd edition), by Raymond A. Smith. ISBN: 9780415814331 Available from \$26.10 at UNT Bookstore.

American Government from OpenStax, ISBN: 1938168178. Available for free online. www.openstax.org/details/american-government

What You'll Do in PSCI 2316

1

TEAM-BASED LEARNING & READINESS ASSURANCE TESTS (RATS)

This course uses a team-based learning approach that emphasizes your ability to apply course concepts and to solve problems. Course requirements are designed to ensure that individuals are prepared for team work and minimize the likelihood of typical "group work" problems (individuals shirking their responsibilities, other individuals dominating the group, or the division of labor to avoid group interaction).

Course grades will be based on work from individuals and teams. You will be assigned to a team during the first day of class.

At the beginning of each course unit, you will take an **individual Readiness Assurance Test (iRAT)**. You will then take the same **Readiness Assurance Test as a team (a tRAT)**. After the RATs, we will explore the unit's topic through short lectures and team application exercises.

4

REFLECTIONS

Individual reflective writing assignments will ask you to think about course concepts and the ways in which they apply to your life and/or to contemporary political debates. Assignment details are in Canvas.

2

PEER EVALUATIONS

You will complete peer evaluations of your teammates at multiple points during the semester. You will be evaluated on both the quality of feedback you provide about your teammates' performances and on how your teammates evaluate your performance.

3

AMENDMENT PROJECT

Working individually or with a partner, you will propose an institutional reform to the American system of government that would require amending the U.S. Constitution. This project will require that you conduct research on the feature of the constitution you would like to change and write a 5-6 page paper that articulates the problems associated with the relevant existing constitutional provision and explains how your proposed amendment would address that problem.

Topics will be chosen in consultation with the instructor. Students will present their recommendations to the class on December 4 and December 6.

5

FINAL EXAM

There will be one exam in the course. The exam will be administered during the course's scheduled final exam period: Monday, December 11 at 1:30 pm.

Grading

Your grade will be based on the components described above: individual Readiness Assurance Tests (iRATs), team performance (team Readiness Assurance Tests–tRATs–and in-class activities), reflections, peer evaluations, the amendment project (research paper + presentation), and the final exam. The class will have a role in determining how these assignments are weighted. I have established minimum weights for each course component–these sum to 75%. The class will determine how to allocate the remaining 25% across the course components, subject to the constraint that peer evaluations can have a maximum weight of 20%. The allocation of these 25 points will be established during our first class meeting.

Assignment	Minimum Weight	Class Points Allocated	Assignment Weight
iRATs (9)	20		
Team performance (tRATs and other in-class team activities)	10		
Reflections (3)	10		
Amendment Project	15		
Peer Evaluations	10		(max 20)
Final Exam	10		
TOTALS	75	25	100

Course Grades

Course assignments will be weighted according to the weights chosen on the first day of class. Scores will be rounded to the nearest whole number and then letter grades will be assigned according to the scale below. There are no opportunities for extra credit.

90-100% = A

80-89% = B

70-79% = C

60-69% = D

<60 = F

Policies

Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodation at any time, however ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the ODA website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity. Any suspected case of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with the University Policy and procedures. Possible academic penalties range from a verbal or written admonition to a grade of F in the course. Further sanctions may apply to incidents involving major violations. You will find the policy and procedures at <http://faculty.success.unt.edu/academic-integrity>.

Classroom Conduct

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>.

Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, and Assault

UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are civil rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

UNT's Dean of Students website offers a range of on-campus and off-campus resources to help support survivors, depending on their unique needs: http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources_0. Renee LeClaire McNamara is UNT's Student Advocate and she can be reached through e-mail at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students' office at 940-565-2648. You are not alone. We are here to help.

Schedule

Readings from Smith's *American Anomaly* are denoted AA on the schedule below. Readings from your OpenStax textbook are denoted TB. Use the Reading Guides posted in Canvas to guide your pre-class preparation. Some additional short readings will be added to this list for non-RAT days.

Course Introduction

August 28 (M)	Read Syllabus, join 2316 Slack team
August 30 (W)	No Class Meeting - American Political Science Association Conference
September 4 (M)	No Class Meeting - Labor Day

Unit 1: The U.S. Constitution

September 6 (W)	iRAT 1 and tRAT 1 TB Chapter 2: The Constitution and Its Origins AA Chapter 2: The U.S. Constitution AA Chapter 4: The Separation of Powers
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September 11 (M)

September 13 (W)

Unit 2: Federalism

September 18 (M)	iRAT 2 and tRAT 2 TB Chapter 3: American Federalism AA Chapter 3: Federalism
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September 20 (W)

September 22 (Friday)
Reflection 1 due in Canvas by 11:59 pm

September 25 (M)

Unit 3: The Legislative Branch

September 27 (W)	iRAT 3 and tRAT 3 TB Chapter 11: Congress AA Chapter 6: The Legislative Branch: The Two Houses of Congress
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October 2 (M)

October 4 (W)

Unit 4: The Presidency

October 9 (M) **iRAT 4 and tRAT 4**
TB Chapter 12: The Presidency
AA Chapter 5: The Executive Branch–The Presidency and the
Bureaucracy

October 11 (W) Midterm Peer Evaluations due by 11:59 pm

October 16 (M)

Unit 5: The Bureaucracy

October 18 (W) **iRAT 5 and tRAT 5**
TB Chapter 15: The Bureaucracy

October 20 (Friday) Reflection 2 due in Canvas by 11:59 pm

October 23 (M)

Unit 6: Texas Legislative and Executive Branches

October 25 (W) **iRAT 6 and tRAT 6**
TB Chapter 14: State and Local Government, sections 14.3, 14.4, and
14.5
Additional reading(s) TBA

October 30 (M)

November 1 (W) Amendment Project Day

Unit 7: The Judiciary

November 6 (M) **iRAT 7 and tRAT 7**
TB Chapter 13: The Courts
AA Chapter 7: The Judicial Branch–The Supreme Court and the Federal
Courts

Carp, Stidham, and Manning, *The State Courts*, Chapter 4 “Judges in
State Courts.” Read sections on “Selection Process for State Judges,”
pages 2-9. (This reading is posted in the Judiciary module in Canvas.)

November 8 (W)

November 13 (M)

Unit 8: Civil Liberties & Civil Rights

November 15 (W) **DOUBLE POINTS RATs (iRAT 8 + iRAT 9, tRAT 8 + tRAT 9)**
TB Chapter 4: Civil Liberties
TB Chapter 5: Civil Rights
AA Chapter 12: Domestic Policy
AA Conclusion: The American Anomaly on Balance

November 17
(Friday) Reflection 3 due in Canvas by 11:59 pm.

November 20 (M)

November 22 (W) No Class Meeting - Have a great Thanksgiving!

November 27 (M)

November 29 (W)

Amendment Project Papers & Presentations

December 3
(Sunday) Amendment Papers due in Canvas by 11:59 pm.

December 4 (M) Amendment Project Presentations

December 6 (W) Amendment Project Presentations

Final Exam

December 11 (M)
@ 1:30 pm
