

PSCI 1040: American Government–Laws and Institutions
Fall 2015
TR 8:00 AM–9:20 AM, ENV 125

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Office: Wooten Hall 154
Office Hours: Tuesdays from 10:00 am–12:00 pm in Rawlins Hall Lobby,
Wednesdays from 1:00 pm–3:00 pm in Wooten 154, and by appointment

The purpose of this course is to 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 as well as the institutions that comprise the three branches of government.

Being in Touch

Office Hours & Email

My office hours are listed above and I will always be available during those times. Even outside of those hours I am often in my office and you are welcome to stop in any time my door is open. You can reach me by email at blackstone@unt.edu. If you write me Monday through Friday, I should get back to you within 24 hours. If I don't, please feel free to send me a reminder! If you write over the weekend, you may have to wait until Monday for a reply. A note on etiquette: (1) please sign your emails with your name, (2) please include an appropriate salutation (Hint: you can't go wrong with, "Hi, Dr. Blackstone."), and (3) please ask a specific question if you need a response.

If I need to contact you, I will send you a message at your UNT email address. Please check Blackboard and your UNT email regularly so you will receive all course-related information.

Blackboard

A Blackboard conference is maintained for this course at <https://learn.unt.edu/>. You should check Blackboard regularly to ensure that you are up to date on all class-related information. Some course assignments will be submitted in Blackboard and student grades will be posted in Blackboard.

Remind

If you wish to receive course-related reminders via email or text, you may sign up to receive notifications at this link: <http://remind.com/join/1040majors>.

Facebook

I have created a Facebook group for students enrolled in PSCI 1040. I will post links to news stories related to American and Texas politics to the Facebook group. You are also welcome to post information relevant to class. Joining the group is optional and will not impact your grade. If you wish to join the group, go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1040majors>.

Be advised that information you share in the course Facebook page is governed by Facebook’s privacy policies. Also, note that I do not guarantee that I will read and respond to every post in the Facebook group; if you have a question that only I can answer, email me or see me in my office.

Required Materials

1. Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright. 2015. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics*, 6th Brief Edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. (Hereinafter, *KTR*.)

ISBN for print+eBook edition: 9781483381138.

ISBN for eBook only: 9781483380681.

- This text can be purchased at the UNT Bookstore. Prices range from \$59.45 (for online access only) to \$83.45 (for a hard copy that also includes eBook access).
- If you purchase this text elsewhere, be sure to buy the 6th Brief edition and be sure that your text comes with an access code for Sage EdgeSelect. Students must have access to EdgeSelect to complete some assignments. Used versions do not typically include access codes.

2. Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson. 2014. *Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives on How to Fix the American Political System*, second edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

ISBN is 978-1452240022.

- This book is currently on-order at the bookstore. The price of the text at the UNT bookstore will range from \$34.00 (for eBook access) to \$50.00 (for a new hard-copy).
- You may rent or purchase electronic or hard-copies of the text from Amazon.com or other online retailers. Amazon pricing ranges from \$13.93 (for eBook rental through December 12) to \$41.66 (for the purchase of a new hard copy).
 - [Link to text on Amazon.com](#). (If you use this link to rent, be sure to update the rental end date to purchase access for the whole semester.)

Assignments & Grading

Your course grade will be based on the following components.

Component	Percent of Course Grade
Exams	50
Debate	25 (10% for in-class debate; 15% for paper)
Quizzes, In-Class Activities, and Homework	20
Participation	5
Total	100

Course grades will be assigned according to the following schedule: $\geq 90\%$ is an A; 80–89% is a B; 70–79% is a C; 60–69% is a D, and $<60\%$ is an F.

Exams (50%)

There will be two exams in the course; each will be worth 25% of your course grade. Exams will include

a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Both exams will be take-home, open-book/note tests that will be administered through Blackboard. The midterm exam is due by 5:00 pm on Monday, October 19. The final exam is due by 5:00 pm on Wednesday, December 9.

Exams will be posted at least 48 hours prior to their due dates. Students are expected to complete the exam during the scheduled time. Alternative exam times will only be offered if a student has a university-excused absence or a family or medical emergency that prevents them from completing the exam during the allotted time. Students must provide appropriate documentation to verify the need for an alternative exam time. If you are unable to take an exam during the scheduled time because of travel with a UNT athletic or performance group or for observance of a religious holiday, you should make arrangements to take your exam early.

Debate (10% for debate + 15% for paper)

Each of you will lead a class debate on a proposed reform to the American political system. Students will complete a survey indicating their preferred topics during the first week of class. I will assign debate topics and perspectives (pro/con) by Tuesday, September 1. In most cases, students will be in teams of two, representing an affirmative or negative side. Within each team, one person will be responsible for presenting the opening and response to questions; the other student will present the challenge and closing. While it is the responsibility of these students to lead the debate, all students are expected to participate in the question and answer session.

Each student will submit an 8- to 10-page paper on their debate topic in class *one week before* their debate. This will enable me to give you feedback before your presentation. Late papers will be penalized 10 points per 24-hour period that they are late beginning at 8:01 am on their due date. Additional details and the rubric I will use to evaluate your debates and papers are posted in Blackboard.

Quizzes, In-Class Activities, and Homework (20%)

You will earn points for quizzes on the assigned readings, for announced and unannounced in-class activities, and for supplementary assignments that are required during the semester. Quizzes on assigned readings are closed book, but you may use notes that you have taken on the assigned readings as long as they are printed in hard copy. (You cannot use a laptop, tablet device, or phone during quizzes.) Missed quizzes and in-class activities cannot be made up. If you have a university-excused absence, you will not be penalized for missing points offered in class if you provide appropriate documentation to verify your absence.

For each assigned reading in the *Keeping the Republic* text, you are required to complete a PreTest and a PostTest in EdgeSelect. You will earn full credit for completing the PreTest by the assigned deadline, regardless of your score on the test. You may re-take the PostTests until you are satisfied with your score but they must be completed by the following deadlines:

PostTests for Chapters 1-5 are due by 11:59 on October 15.

PostTests for Chapters 6-9 are due by 11:59 pm on December 3.

I encourage students to complete the PostTests during the week that we cover material in class and not to wait until the deadlines to begin them. The deadlines are delayed so that students have an opportunity to review material if they find it difficult.

Participation (5%)

Your participation is expected. You will earn points for actively participating in class discussions. Your participation grade is based not only on the quantity of your remarks in class, but also on their quality. Come to class prepared to contribute thoughtfully to the discussion and to answer questions posed by your fellow classmates.

Attendance

I encourage and expect you to attend all class sessions. I will take attendance every class. You are permitted three absences without penalty. Each absence beyond these three will result in a 1-point deduction from your final course grade. You should “save” sufficient absences to deal with unexpected problems that arise during the semester. You will not be granted extra absences because of unexpected personal problems that require you to miss class. Don’t waste your absences because you don’t feel like coming to class. Save them in case you need them. If you miss class for a university–excused absence, your absence will count towards your total absences; you are not permitted “extra” penalty-free absences. If your participation in a university–excused activity or observance of religious holidays will require you to miss more than 3 classes, see me to discuss accommodations.

Extra Credit

Students may earn up to 2 points of extra credit added to their final course grade by making background presentations for the scheduled debates. The background presenter(s) will introduce the debate with a presentation using a program such as PowerPoint or Prezi and will submit a 1-page outline of their presentation on the day of the debate. Students wishing to serve as background presenters must indicate their intention to serve as a background presenter on the debate assignment survey. Each student may serve as a background presenter for one debate.

Note: students do not automatically earn the full 2 points of extra credit for completing a background presentation. Presenters will be evaluated on their preparedness and the quality of their presentations and outlines.

Students should not expect or ask for additional extra credit. *If* additional extra credit is offered, it will be offered to the entire class. Note the grading criteria and plan accordingly for your success. If you need a particular grade to graduate, keep a scholarship, etc., then exert the effort necessary to earn such a grade. If problems arise, address them early before they become unresolvable!

Policies

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://facultysuccess.unt.edu/academic-integrity>.

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 accommodations 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 such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

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>.

Laptop Use

If you elect to use a laptop in class, you must sit in the last row of used classroom seats. Recent research suggests that using laptops in class is negatively associated with student success. I advise against using laptops. The larger problem is that laptop use negatively affects student success for the people sitting around laptop users. In order to ensure that laptop users do not create distractions for other students, laptop users must sit in the back of the room.

Class Schedule

Readings and assignments should be completed prior to the class meeting for which they are listed, unless otherwise noted. ☉ indicates there is no reading assignment due for a class meeting. ▷ indicates there is no class meeting on this day but an assignment is due.

Course Introduction

August 25 (T) Read the syllabus.

American Political Culture & the Constitution

August 27 (R) Register for access to EdgeSelect at <https://edgeselect.sagepub.com/launch/>.
The course code is C-HHJX-KZDX-KCCD
 Complete PreTest for *KTR* Chapter 1 on [EdgeSelect](#) site.
 Read *KTR* Chapter 1: Power and Citizenship in American Politics

August 28 (F) ▷ Complete Debate Assignment Survey by 11:59 pm. [Link to survey](#). (There is also a link to the survey posted in [Blackboard](#).)

September 1 (T) Complete PreTest for *KTR* Chapter 2 on [EdgeSelect](#) site.
 Read *KTR* Chapter 2: The Politics of the American Founding

September 3 (R) Read Bessette, *The Mild Voice of Reason*, Chapter 2 (posted in Blackboard)

September 8 (T) Read Wirls, "Staggered Terms for the U.S. Senate: Origins and Irony" (posted in Blackboard)

September 10 (R) ☉

By October 15 (R) Complete Post-Test for *KTR* Chapter 1 on [EdgeSelect](#) site by 11:59 pm.
 Complete Post-Test for *KTR* Chapter 2 on [EdgeSelect](#) site by 11:59 pm.

Federalism

September 15 (T) Complete PreTest for *KTR* Chapter 3 on [EdgeSelect](#) site.
 Read *KTR* Chapter 3: Federalism

September 17 (R) ☉

September 22 (T) Read *Debating Reform* Chapter 1.

September 24 (R) Read *Debating Reform* Chapter 2.

By October 15 (R) Complete Post-Test for *KTR* Chapter 3 on [EdgeSelect](#) site by 11:59 pm.

Civil Liberties & Civil Rights

- September 29 (T) Complete PreTest for *KTR* Chapter 4 on [EdgeSelect](#) site.
 Read *KTR* Chapter 4: Civil Liberties
- October 1 (R)
- October 6 (T) Complete PreTest for *KTR* Chapter 5 on [EdgeSelect](#) site.
 Read *KTR* Chapter 5: Civil Rights
- October 8 (R)
- October 13 (T) Read *Debating Reform* Chapter 4.
- By October 15 (R) Complete Post-Test for *KTR* Chapter 4 on [EdgeSelect](#) site by 11:59 pm.
 Complete Post-Test for *KTR* Chapter 5 on [EdgeSelect](#) site by 11:59 pm.

Midterm Exam

- October 15 (R) *No Class Meeting. Complete your KTR post-tests and begin work on your midterm.*
- October 19 (M) **▷ Submit your midterm exam in Blackboard by 5:00 pm.**

Texas Legislative and Executive Branches

- October 20 (T)

Congress

- October 22 (R) Complete PreTest for *KTR* Chapter 6 on [EdgeSelect](#) site.
 Read *KTR* Chapter 6: Congress
- October 27 (T)
- October 29 (R) Read *Debating Reform* Chapter 11.
- November 3 (T) Read *Debating Reform* Chapter 13.
- November 5 (R) Read *Debating Reform* Chapter 14.
- By December 3 (R) Complete Post-Test for *KTR* Chapter 6 on [EdgeSelect](#) site by 11:59 pm.

The Presidency & the Bureaucracy

- November 10 (T) Complete PreTest for *KTR* Chapter 7 on **EdgeSelect** site.
 Read *KTR* Chapter 7: The Presidency
- November 12 (R) Read *Debating Reform* Chapter 16.
- November 17 (T) Complete PreTest for *KTR* Chapter 8 on **EdgeSelect** site.
 Read *KTR* Chapter 8: The Bureaucracy
- November 19 (R) Read *Debating Reform* Chapter 17.
- By December 3 (R) Complete Post-Test for *KTR* Chapter 7 on **EdgeSelect** site by 11:59 pm.
By December 3 (R) Complete Post-Test for *KTR* Chapter 8 on **EdgeSelect** site by 11:59 pm.

Courts

- November 24 (T) Complete PreTest for *KTR* Chapter 9 on **EdgeSelect** site.
 Read *KTR* Chapter 9: The American Legal System and the Courts
- November 26 (R) *No Class Meeting. Happy Thanksgiving!*
- December 1 (T) ⊙
- December 3 (R) Read *Debating Reform* Chapter 18.
- By December 3 (R) Complete Post-Test for *KTR* Chapter 9 on **EdgeSelect** site by 11:59 pm.

End of Semester Deadlines

- December 3 (R) Post-Tests for *KTR* Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 are due by 11:59 pm.
- December 9 (W) ▷ **Submit your final exam in Blackboard by 5:00 pm.**