

# American Government: Laws and Institutions

PSCI 1040

Maymester



## Course Overview

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, and the institutions that comprise the three branches of government.

We will be using Canvas for this course. Canvas is a learning management system that UNT is considering adopting as an alternative to Blackboard. Access the course Canvas page at <http://unt.instructure.com>. You should use Canvas for all course-related communications.

In order to succeed in this intensive class, you must complete the assigned readings outside of class and attend class regularly. If you cannot commit to preparing for class and attending class every day from 8:00 am to 11:50 am, you should withdraw and re-enroll in the course during a 5-week summer session or a long semester.

## YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Professor Bethany Blackstone  
Contact via Canvas

## YOUR TEACHING ASSISTANT

Ms. Hope Dewell Gentry  
Contact via Canvas

## CLASS MEETINGS

Mondays, 8:00-11:50 am  
Tuesdays, 8:00-11:50 am  
Wednesdays, 8:00-11:50 am  
Thursdays, 8:00-11:50 am  
ENV 110

## OFFICE HOURS

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](http://www.openstax.org/details/american-government)

## What You'll Do in PSCI 1040

**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).

All team work is done during class time. 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 class day, you will take an **individual Readiness Assurance Test (iRAT)**. You will then take the same **Readiness Assurance Test as a team (a tRAT)**. It is thus imperative that you come to class prepared by doing all assigned reading.

After the daily RATs, we will explore the day's topic through short lectures and team application exercises. You will use your understanding of course material to solve problems. As a team, you will come to a consensus on your solution; you will report your solution to the class and defend it as a team. These problems will serve as a basis for class discussion.

**2**

### 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.

Reflection prompts and rubrics are posted in Canvas.

**3**

### PEER EVALUATIONS

You will complete peer evaluations of your teammates twice during the course. You will be required to differentiate in your allocation of points to your teammates. (You can't give everyone the same score.)

**4**

### FINAL EXAM

There will be one exam in the course. Question types will include multiple choice, true/false, and matching. The exam will be administered during the course's scheduled final exam period: June 1 at 8:00 am in our regular classroom.

## Grading

Your grade will be based on the components described above: individual Readiness Assurance Tests (iRATs), team Readiness Assurance Tests (tRATs), reflections, peer evaluations, and a final exam. The weighting of these course components will be established during the first class period by the class. A representative from each team will participate in the deliberations. Grade weights will be set using the procedure below.

1. Each team will meet to discuss their preferred allocation of weights between the various course assignments, subject to the constraints listed in the table below.
2. Team representatives will meet at the front of the room and develop a consensus about the assignments weights for the class as a whole.

Assignment Weights	Weight	Min (%)	Max %
iRATs		10	25
Reflections		10	25
Final Exam		10	25
Team Performance (tRATs and other in-class team activities)		10	45
Peer Evaluation		10	30
TOTAL = 100%			

## Course Grades

Course assignments will be weighted by 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

## Supplemental Instruction

The UNT Learning Center provides Supplemental Instruction for this course. SI Leaders are UNT students that have taken this course and performed well. Your SI Leader is **Allyson Grosskreutz**. Allyson will hold group study sessions throughout the summer session. SI Sessions will be added to the course calendar in Canvas once the schedule is finalized. You can reach Allyson at [allysontaylor109@yahoo.com](mailto:allysontaylor109@yahoo.com).

# Other 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://facultysuccess.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](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](mailto: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. Note—class does not meet on Fridays, but Reflections are due on Fridays.

Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments Due
<b>Monday, May 15</b>	Course Introduction	Syllabus Charts 1 and 2 in <i>American Anomaly</i>
<b>Tuesday, May 16</b>	The U.S. Constitution	TB Chapter 2: The Constitution and Its Origins AA Chapter 2: The U.S. Constitution AA Chapter 4: The Separation of Powers
<b>Wednesday, May 17</b>	Federalism	TB Chapter 3: American Federalism AA Chapter 3: Federalism
<b>Thursday, May 18</b>	The Legislative Branch	TB Chapter 11: Congress AA Chapter 6: The Legislative Branch: The Two Houses of Congress
<b>Friday, May 19</b>		Reflection 1 Due by noon.
<b>Monday, May 22</b>	The Presidency	TB Chapter 12: The Presidency AA Chapter 5: The Executive Branch—The Presidency and the Bureaucracy
<b>Tuesday, May 23</b>	The Bureaucracy	TB Chapter 15: The Bureaucracy
<b>Wednesday, May 24</b>	Texas Legislative & Executive Branches	TB Chapter 14: State and Local Government, sections 14.3, 14.4, and 14.5
<b>Thursday, May 25</b>	The Judiciary	TB Chapter 13: The Courts AA Chapter 7: The Judicial Branch—The Supreme Court and the Federal Courts
<b>Friday, May 26</b>		Reflection 2 Due by noon.
<b>Monday, May 29</b>	Memorial Day - No Class Meeting	
<b>Tuesday, May 30</b>	Civil Liberties	TB Chapter 4: Civil Liberties AA Chapter 12: Domestic Policy: Socioeconomic Regulation, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights (read up to Civil Rights)
<b>Wednesday, May 31</b>	Civil Rights	TB Chapter 5: Civil Rights AA Chapter 12 (from Civil Rights to end) AA Chapter 13: Conclusion—the American Anomaly on Balance
<b>Thursday, June 1</b>	Final Exam @ 8:00 am	

