

PSCI 2305: U.S. Political Behavior and Policy

Spring 2026

TuTh, 12:30-1:50 PM
Eagle Student Services Center 255

Professor Brian Hamel
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Description

The United States is a representative democracy, meaning that there should be a connection between what people want and what government does. This course examines that connection — whether it exists, how strong it is, and under what conditions it holds. We'll pay particular attention to the origins, coherence, and stability of citizen preferences, as well as to the institutions and mechanisms designed to translate those preferences into public policy (e.g., elections, political parties, interest groups, and the media). We'll also study the stages of policymaking — from agenda setting through evaluation — before concluding with a broad overview of the contemporary U.S. economic, social, and foreign policy landscape. Throughout, we'll grapple with a fundamental question: whether, when, and for whom American democracy works as intended.

As a large, introductory-level course, it is primarily lecture-based, but active student participation is both welcome and encouraged. Please note that this course is not a forum for partisan advocacy. Instead, it is an introduction to political *science*, which seeks to understand politics using evidence and systematic analysis rather than personal opinion. By the

end of the semester, students will be equipped to objectively analyze political news and events and prepared for advanced coursework in political science and other empirical social sciences.

You are probably taking this course because it is required, and you might reasonably wonder why. The answer is simple: *you may not be interested in politics and government, but they are interested in you.* They affect your life in concrete and unavoidable ways — from determining where homes can be built and how expensive they are to influencing how health insurance markets function and how much medical care costs. Understanding how government works — what it does, why it does what it does, and who influences its decisions — is key to making sense of your everyday life. This course is designed to help you do exactly that.

Materials

Students are required to rent or purchase the following textbook:

Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, Stephen Ansolabehere, and Hahrie Han. 2025. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. 18th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

While you may use a previous edition of the book, you are responsible for all material in the 18th Edition. Use earlier editions at your own risk — the older the edition, the greater the risk.

Students are required to purchase the 2305 Workbook. Simply open one of the assigned chapters on Canvas and follow the instructions provided. A three-week free trial period is available; however, it will not allow you to complete all eight assignments during that three-week period. *A limited number of access codes are available on a first-come, first-served basis for students experiencing financial hardship.*

Students must also join the iClicker class page. If you already have an iClicker account, you will be automatically added to the class page; if not, instructions will be emailed to you on the first day of class. Students who choose to use their smartphone to answer iClicker questions must also download the iClicker app for iOS or Android.

Assignments and Grades

Your final grade will be based on the following:

- Syllabus Quiz (5%): To ensure familiarity with course expectations and policies, students will take a short syllabus quiz. The quiz is due by **January 20**.
- iClicker Questions (10%): During class sessions, students will periodically respond to questions about course material on iClicker. Students earn 0.5 points for participation and an additional 0.5 points for correct responses. iClicker questions must be completed during class; there are no make-ups. Students may participate using a laptop

or smartphone. Students who miss class on a day when iClicker questions are asked *and* provide a documented, university-excused absence will not lose any points.

- Workbook (20%): There are eight workbook chapters designed to test your understanding of key course concepts. These workbook chapters are organized around the four learning objectives adopted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: critical thinking, communication, personal responsibility, and social responsibility. Due dates are listed on the course schedule.
- Exams (65%): There will be four in-person exams, each consisting of 50 multiple-choice questions drawn from the lectures, textbook, and workbook. The exam dates are **February 17, March 26, April 30, and May 7**. *Students are required to take three exams.* If you are satisfied with your grade after the first three exams, you may skip the cumulative final exam on May 7. If you take all four exams, your lowest score will be dropped. Make-up exams will not be given unless you have a documented, university-excused absence. If you miss one exam without a valid excuse, you must take the final exam as a replacement; the zero from the missed exam will be dropped. If, for example, you miss two exams without an excuse, you may replace one with the final but will receive a zero on the other. A study guide will be provided one week prior to each exam. For all exams except the final, a review session will be held during the class period immediately preceding the exam.

Final grades will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Percentage Grade
A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

Policies and Resources

Contacting Me

The fastest way to reach me is via email. I will typically respond within 24 hours. When emailing me, please include “PSCI 2305” followed by a brief description of your question or concern in the subject line of the email. Your email should be professional and should include a greeting such as “Dear Professor Hamel” or “Hello Dr. Hamel.” You are also encouraged to visit during my office hours. If you are unavailable during my office hours, please email me to schedule an appointment, either in-person or on Zoom. I welcome the opportunity to meet you, learn about your background and interests, and help in any way that I can. If you read this before class on January 13, please email me what you are hoping to learn from this course and your favorite Taylor Swift song. Doing so will earn you two extra credit points on your final grade.

Technology in Class

You may use a laptop during class to take notes. Know, however, that [taking notes with a laptop has a negative effect on learning and course performance](#). I strongly encourage that you take notes in class using a pen and paper. You will thank me later.

Late Work

You will be penalized for late assignments unless you have a valid, documented excuse. The penalty for unexcused late work is five percentage points per day. For example, if the quality of your work would have earned a 95, but the assignment is submitted two days late without an approved excuse, you will receive an 85. Valid excuses include illness, serious family emergencies, and religious holidays. I am generally willing to be flexible and to accommodate reasonable requests for extensions, but you must contact me in advance.

Grade Disputes

You must wait a minimum of 24 hours after receiving a graded assignment before contacting me regarding your grade. If you wish to dispute your grade, you must do so via email within one week of the date that grades are made available to the class. Grade disputes will not be considered if submitted past the one-week statute of limitations. When requesting reconsideration of a grade, you should provide a clear explanation as to why a different grade is in order. When work is reviewed for a grade dispute, the grade may be left unchanged, raised, or lowered.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

Accommodations for Disabilities

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of 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 accommodation for every semester. For additional information, visit the [ODA website](#).

Mental Health Services

Mental health challenges can significantly hinder learning. UNT can support you in overcoming these obstacles. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus [here](#) and [here](#).

Writing Services

UNT's Writing Center can help you with structure, grammar, punctuation, citation styles, and more on any written assignment. They offer both in-person and online appointments. To schedule an appointment, call 940-565-2563 or email WritingCenter@unt.edu. You can also find more information on their [website](#).

Schedule

Tentative and subject to change.

Tuesday, January 13: Introduction

Thursday, January 15: Collective Action

Read:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 1

Tuesday, January 20: Constitutional Foundations

Read:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 2

Thursday, January 22: Public Opinion I

Read:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 10

Tuesday, January 27: Public Opinion II

Thursday, January 29: Polling

Due:

- Workbook, Chapter 1: Public Opinion

Tuesday, February 3: No Class — Professor Hamel at a conference

Thursday, February 5: No Class — Professor Hamel at a conference

Tuesday, February 10: Participation

Due:

- Workbook, Chapter 2: Political Participation

Thursday, February 12: Exam #1 Review

Tuesday, February 17: Exam #1

Thursday, February 19: Campaigns and Elections I

Read:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 11

Tuesday, February 24: Campaigns and Elections II

Due:

- Workbook, Chapter 6: Elections and Campaigns

Thursday, February 26: Parties I

Read:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 12

Tuesday, March 3: Parties: II

Due:

- Workbook, Chapter 5: Political Parties

Thursday, March 5: Groups and Identities

Tuesday, March 10: No Class — Spring Break

Thursday, March 12: No Class — Spring Break

Tuesday, March 17: Media I

Read:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 14

Thursday, March 19: Media II

Due:

- Workbook, Chapter 3: The Mass Media

Tuesday, March 24: Exam #2 Review

Thursday, March 26: Exam #2

Tuesday, March 31: Interest Groups I

Read:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 13

Thursday, April 2: Interest Groups II

Due:

- Workbook, Chapter 4: Interest Groups

Tuesday, April 7: Stages of Policymaking I

Thursday, April 9: Stages of Policymaking II

Tuesday, April 14: Economic Policy

Read:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 15

Thursday, April 16: Social Policy

Read:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 16

Due:

- Workbook, Chapter 7: Domestic Policy

Tuesday, April 21: Foreign Policy

Read:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 17

Due:

- Workbook, Chapter 8: Foreign Policy

Thursday, April 23: No Class — Professor Hamel at a conference

Tuesday, April 28: Exam #3 Review

Thursday, April 30: Exam #3

Thursday, May 7 from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM: Final Exam