US & Texas Constitutions and Institutions

PSCI 2306 Sec 410

Winter Session 2025-2026

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Chad M. King
Contact: Chad.King@unt.edu (But please send emails through Canvas)
Office Hours: Mondays 9-10 AM via Zoom.

Teaching assistants & Office Hours:

Students with last names A-K: Mr. Ahmed Hamza, Wednesdays 10-11 AM and by appointment.
Students with last names L-Z: Mr. Afolabi Toye, Tuesdays 10-11 AM and by appointment.

Course Description

"An introduction to the institutions of government, with particular emphasis on the U.S. and Texas Constitutions. Focus on the structure and powers of the three branches of government (both national and Texas); the division of power between those branches (separation of powers); the division of power between national and state governments (federalism); and issues related to civil rights and civil liberties." (From the UNT Course Catalog)

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to
1.   Describe the structure and powers of the three branches of government (both national and Texas)
2.   Explain the division of power between those branches (separation of powers) as well as the division of powers between the national and state governments (federalism)
3.   Explain the limits placed upon the powers of government
4.   Describe the role of compromise in creating our system of laws and institutions and identify both the strengths and weaknesses in the U.S. and Texas systems of government.
5.   Students will develop skills in the areas of critical thinking, social responsibility, personal responsibility, and communications.

Required Course Materials

Textbook information

This course requires the purchase of an electronic webtext, published by Soomo, titled U.S. and Texas Politics with 2306 Workbook 15e, by Jocelyn Evans & Kristy Michaud, The Texas Politics Press. The text is available from both the bookstore and directly from the publisher. Regardless of where you make your purchase, you will receive an access code that you will enter within the course's Canvas shell to gain access to the webtext. Directions on how to do this will be shared within Canvas.

Without this code, you will be unable to complete 40% of the course work, in addition to being unable to access the readings. Soomo provides students with free trial access for a limited time to give students the time necessary to purchase the text. (You will need to check with the publisher for details about the length of the free trial, but I believe it is the first three chapters). It is your responsibility to purchase this textbook, and assignments will not be reopened or extended due to not purchasing the text.

I will regularly refer to Chapters in the textbook as SWC (and then a number) in the remainder of the syllabus. For instance, SWC 4 is a reference to Chapter 4 in the Soomo Webtext. In addition to the required webtext, the instructor may assign online articles or links to supplement course material.

Technology Requirements

This class will use both Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor during exams. Students will need:

- A computer with Lockdown Browser installed (not a phone or tablet)
- A computer with a working web camera.
- Note that Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor only work with Windows Computers, Mac Computers, Chromebook Computers, and iPads. Other devices will not work. More information about this is provided in the course under "Important Information for Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor"

Without these technological requirements, course exams will be inaccessible. An explanation of how to install and test these applications will be provided in Canvas. Students will also be able to access an empty practice exam so they can see how Lockdown Browser and Monitor work in advance of the real exams. Please review the technical information for Lockdown Browser in advance of the exam to avoid missing deadlines, using the following link: https://aits.unt.edu/support/lockdown-browser.html. Respondus Monitor will ensure that

students are not using unauthorized resources on the exams. Students will need to visibly remain on their web cameras for the entirety of the exam.

Technology Requirements for Courses with Digital Materials

This course has digital components. Specifically, most activities can only be completed using the webtext so you must purchase and connect it to our course in Canvas. This also means you must have regular access to a computing device and a high-speed Internet connection to access course content and assignments. If circumstances change in any way, I will inform you, in a timely manner, of additional technical needs. Information on how be successful in a digital learning environment can be found at Learn Anywhere (https://online.unt.edu/learn).

Course Format

This course is an asynchronous, online course that utilizes a webtext along with some supplementary readings coupled with online assignments and exams completed through Canvas. The dates and deadlines for all course activities are listed below. Students should regularly check the course page on Canvas for reminders and important announcements.

Course Assignments, Grades Weights, and Due Dates

Below you will find a list of categories of graded assessments, their respective quantities, and the percentages of the final course grade. The abbreviation "SWC" refers to the Soomo Webtext and will be followed by a number to indicate which chapter in the webtext is being referenced. So, for instance, "SWC 3" refers to Chapter 3 of the Soomo Webtext.

Exams (60% of final course average)

Students will take three exams, each worth 20% of the grade and combined worth 60% of the final course average. All exams will include material from the assigned readings and supplementary material. All exams will feature fifty multiple choice questions and students will have 60 minutes to complete the exam. The dates for all exams and the covered chapters are listed below.

These exams are closed books and closed notes. Students must have Respondus Lockdown Browser installed and enabled to access the exams. Students also must have a webcam turned on during the exam to utilize Respondus Monitor Please review the information provided above in the "Technology Requirements for Courses with Digital Materials" sections for information on how to do this. A course module within Canvas will provide more information about these requirements.

Missed exams will not be reopened, but there is a section below that discusses the process for requesting makeup exams.

Exam schedule and due dates

Two general challenges for this class are the limited number of days and the long course break that occurs in the middle of the term. This break restricts assignment due dates because the important support offices for students (IT and Canvas Support) are not open. As a result, the last two exams have shorter availability windows than the first.

Exam Dates

Exam	Covers	Opens at 9 AM	Closes at 11:59 PM
Exam 1	SWC 1-5	12/19/25	12/21/25
Exam 2	SWC 6-13	1/5/26	1/6/26
Exam 3	SWC 14-19	1/8/26	1/9/26

Make-up exams: Make-up exams are granted exclusively at my discretion. Any request for a make-up exam must be submitted in writing and include documentation explaining why the absence from the exam was legitimate. Requests without documentation will be rejected. Such requests must be received within two calendar days of the missed exam date unless the student is physically unable to submit such a request. Legitimate reasons for requesting a make-up could include illness severe enough to require professional medical treatment, death of an immediate family member, participation in official University activities, or legal obligations. However, because these exams are open for multiple days, your excuse would need to cover the entirety of the examination period. Missing an exam due to forgetting the availability dates or technological issues will not constitute a legitimate reason for requesting a makeup. Please note that the reasons listed above do not guarantee a make-up exam. I will consider requests based upon their individual merits.

Workbook assignments (25% of course average)

Students will complete eight Workbook Chapter assignments from the SWC's, collectively worth 25% of the final course average. Workbook assignment due dates are contained in the schedule below. These assignments contain multiple choice questions that are designed to assess student learning from the mandated student learning outcomes identified by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Please note that you may have both workbook assignments and webtext assignments due on the same day. Students who miss the original deadline can submit assignments late, at a 50% penalty, by the Late Submission Date, listed below. The two lowest assignment grades will be dropped from the class average.

Workbook assignment schedule and due dates

Workbook Activities' Due Dates (Due at 11:59 PM)	Due date	Late Submission Date
Unit 1		
Chapter 2: Workbook: The U.S. Constitution	12/21	12/23
Chapter 5: Workbook: Federalism	12/21	12/23
Unit 2		
Chapter 7: Workbook: Legislatures	1/5	1/7
Chapter 10: Workbook: The Presidency	1/5	1/7
Chapter 12: Workbook: The Bureaucracy	1/5	1/7
Unit 3		
Chapter 15: Workbook: The Courts	1/8	1/9
Chapter 17: Workbook: Civil Liberties	1/8	1/9
Chapter 19: Workbook: Civil Rights	1/8	1/9

Webtext assignments (15% of course average)

Students will complete eleven webtext assignments from the SWC's, collectively worth 15% of the final course average. Webtext assignment due dates are contained in the table below. Please note that you may have both workbook assignments and webtext assignments due on the same day. Students who miss this deadline can submit assignments late, at a 50% penalty, by the Late Submission Date, listed below. The three lowest assignment grades will be dropped from the class average.

Webtext assignment schedule and due dates

Webtext Activities' Due Dates (Due at 11:59 PM)	Due date	Late Submission Date
Unit 1		
Chap 1: The Founding and the Constitution	12/21	12/23
Chap 3: Texas: The Constitution	12/21	12/23
Chap 4: Federalism	12/21	12/23
Unit 2		
Chap 6: Congress	1/5	1/6
Chap 8: Texas: The Legislature	1/5	1/6
Chap 9: The Presidency	1/5	1/6
Chap 11: Bureaucracy	1/5	1/6
Chap 13: Texas: The Executive Branch	1/5	1/6
Unit 3		
Chap 14: The Judiciary	1/8	1/9

Chap 16: Civil Liberties	1/8	1/9
Chap 18: Civil Rights	1/8	1/9

Late Work

As noted, late workbook book assignments and webtext assignments can be submitted up to the dates specified in the tables above with a 50% penalty. Late exams, however, will not be accepted.

Final Letter Grades

Final letter grades in this course will be based on the following scale.

A = 89.5%-100%
B = 79.5%-89.4%
C = 69.5%-79.4%
D = 59.5%-69.4%
F = 59.4% or below

Course Policies and Procedures

Communications

The primary method of communication will be email. Emails should be sent directly through Canvas. Your first point of contact should be the Teaching Assistant that you were assigned (see the top of the Syllabus). They will help you with substantive questions and with basic questions related to Canvas. I will respond within 24 hours to emails sent between M-F normal business hours. Responses to emails sent during the weekend could take 48-72 hours or when the University is closed for holiday break. When emailing, you need to include your course number and section number in the subject line, along with a brief description of the situation. Please be courteous and kind in your email, whether you send it to me or our TA's. You must send your email from your official University email address; we will not respond to emails as we will not respond to email from third party providers.

Academic Integrity Standards and Sanctions for violations

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, (https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003), academic misconduct "means the intentional or unintentional action by a student to engage in behavior in the academic setting including, but not limited to: cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic misconduct, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage." The policy goes on to state that "cheating" is defined as "the use of unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise, including but not limited to: 1. Use of any unauthorized assistance to take exams, tests, quizzes,

or other assessments; 2. Use of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; 3. Use, without permission, of tests, notes, or other academic materials belonging to instructors, staff members, or other students of the University; 4. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor; 5. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage on an academic assignment." Students who engage in academic misconduct can face various consequences including warnings, grade penalties, or expulsion from UNT. It is important for you to review the policy to make sure you understand it and ask questions if you do not. For this class, acts of academic misconduct could include: using unauthorized aides to complete assignments or exams, unauthorized use of Generative AI (see next section) to complete assignments or exams, working together with other students when not authorized to do so, though this list is not exhaustive. You are allowed to study with your classmates, share written notes that you have taken, but the remainder of the course work must be done by you and only you.

For the purposes of exams, use of any materials (notes, textbooks, the Internet, AI, phones/tablets/other devices, etc.) is prohibited. Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor are intended to ensure that students are not using any of these prohibited resources during the examination periods. Respondus Monitor will record behavior suggesting the use of unauthorized materials or unpermitted assistance, including but not limited to using another electronic device, viewing notes, speaking with another person, or repeatedly disconnecting from the exam. If such behavior is observed or documented, the instructor may void the results of an exam as well as report such actions as violations of academic honesty policies.

Gen AI Use

Prohibited Use: In this course, students need to work on their own to engage the material, readings, and overall course content to hone mastery of the material, critical thinking skills, and communication skills. For this reason, use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools such as ChatGPT and similar tools is not permitted when it comes to completing coursework. Using GenAI to complete any coursework (exams, assignments) will be considered a violation of academic integrity rules and will be addressed according to the Academic Integrity policy discussed above. If you are unsure whether you can use something, ask the instructor.

Extra Credit

There is no extra credit, so please do not ask (this is why I drop low assignments).

Additional Important Course Policies

Attendance and Participation

Because this course is online, there is no attendance requirement. Assignments and exams have due dates that students must meet.

How to Succeed in this Course and at the University

Grades are based upon a mastery of the presented material, and you are responsible for your own success. Course activities will likely not be curved. I encourage you to find opportunities to learn with and through others. Explore Navigate360's Study Buddy (https://navigate.unt.edu) tool to join study groups. You can also use the coaching staff at the Learning Center. (Note that hours may be limited over the Holiday break)

You are also encouraged to contact me or the TA's during office hours if you are struggling. Simply put, I cannot help you if you do not seek out that help. One on one, assistance is usually the best way to overcome course-related challenges.

UNT offers a range of mental health and wellness services to help maintain balance and well-being. If you need these types of support to help your academic and personal success, then do so. (Note that hours may be limited over the Holiday break)

Mental health services: (https://clear.unt.edu/student-support-services-policies)

Success services: (https://www.unt.edu/success)

Wellness services: (https://www.unt.edu/wellness)

Syllabus change policy

This syllabus is a guide. Sometimes circumstances or events, or even class progress, require tweaks or modifications to a course syllabus during the semester. Any changes to the syllabus will be announced in advance. No additional work will ever be assigned, nor will deadlines ever be moved to earlier than stated in the syllabus (unless an egregious error is found in the syllabus or Canvas).

ADA Statement

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, students must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify a student's eligibility each semester. Once eligibility is confirmed, a student may request a letter of accommodation. ODA will then email faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about students' specific needs in the course.

Students can request accommodations at any time, but it is important to provide ODA notice to faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding their accommodations during office hours. Faculty have the authority to ask students to discuss the letter during their designated office hours to protect student privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support learning needs, refer to the Office of Disability Access website (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) or contact them by phone at 940-565-4323.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation

The University of North Texas prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admissions process; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Creating an Inclusive Environment

Every student in this class has the right to learn and engage within an environment of respect and courtesy from others. All discussions should be civil and respectful. Although disagreements and debates are encouraged, personal attacks are not acceptable. By working together, the class can ensure a safe and welcoming environment for all. If a student ever feels like this is not the case, please contact me to discuss this. Students are encouraged to review UNT's student code of conduct so that they start with the same baseline civility understanding (Code of Student Conduct) (https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012.)

Campus Closure

UNT is committed to the safety and security of the campus community and recognizes the value of maintaining university operations. However, in the event university operations are disrupted due to an emergency or other hazardous conditions threatening the safety, health, or welfare of the campus community, UNT may be required to cancel classes, suspend operations, or close the campus in its entirety. Students will be notified by Eagle Alert if there is a campus closing that will impact a class.

Important Notice for F-1 Students taking Distance Education Courses

To comply with immigration regulations, an F-1 visa holder within the United States may need to engage in an on-campus experiential component for this course. This component (which must be approved in advance by the instructor) can include activities such as taking an on-campus exam, participating in an on-campus lecture or lab activity, or other on-campus experiences integral to the completion of this course. If such an on-campus activity is required, it is the student's responsibility to do the following:

(1) Submit a written request to the instructor for an on-campus experiential component within one week of the start of the course. (2) Ensure that the activity on campus takes place and the instructor documents it in writing with a notice sent to the International Student and Scholar Services Office. ISSS has a form available that you may use for this purpose. Because the decision may have serious immigration consequences, if an F-1 student is unsure about his or her need to participate in an on-campus experiential component for this course, s/he should contact the UNT International Student and Scholar Services Office (telephone 940-565-2195 or email internationaladvising@unt.edu) to get clarification before the one-week deadline.

Recommended Reading Schedule

Below is the recommended schedule for the assigned readings for the Soomo Webtext Chapters. The abbreviation "SWC" followed by a number indicates a specific chapter(s) out of the Soomo Webtext that you need to read. With the long break in the middle of the term, it would be a good idea to read ahead so you can avoid having to complete the assignments at the last minute.

Dates	Topic	Reading Assignment
	Unit 1	
12/15-12/16	The Constitution	SWC 1 & 2
12/17	Texas Constitution	SWC 3
12/18-12/19	Federalism	SWC 4 & 5
12/20	Congress, Texas Legislature	SWC 6, 7, & 8
12/21	The Presidency	SWC 9 & 10
12/22	Bureaucracy	SWC 11 & 12
12/23	Texas Executive Branch	SWC 13
1/6	The Judiciary	SWC 14 & 15
1/7	Civil Liberties	SWC 16 & 17
1/8	Civil Rights	SWC 18 & 19